



Solutions

## **Best Practices** for Employee Engagement, Productivity, and Software Adoption

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# Employee Engagement

In large enterprises, employee engagement is fostered and sustained in a number of ways: high-quality software training is a primary foundation; people are happier and more motivated when fully enabled for their work responsibilities and challenges; and **younger employees put a special premium on continuous learning** that equips them with the know-how to advance their careers.

Training existing staff is especially important in a global talent market where competition is fierce and skill shortages widespread, especially as it's not always possible to find external candidates to fill every role. In addition, the nature of new digitally transformative software makes enablement more critical than ever. Employees can't be expected to use cutting-edge platforms as intended without instruction in new skills and fresh ways of thinking.

Despite all this, users often don't receive the right kind of training, or nearly enough of it. As a result, employees are left unequipped to harness the full potential of new technology. This inevitably leads to frustration, low software adoption, poor performance, disengagement, and – in today's job arena – attrition of capable employees. It's hard to imagine a clearer lose/lose scenario than software under-performance and talent heading for the exits.

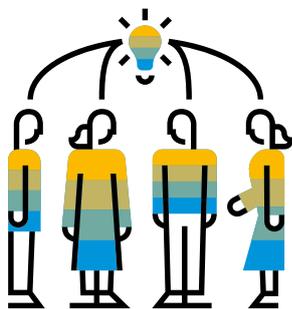
Here's how to flip it to a win for both employees and the enterprise.



# User Training Yields Rich Rewards

There is no shortage of rationalizations for skimping on software instruction: budget and resource limitations, time constraints, lack of program development know-how, too many users across too many regions, and so on. When excuses like these surface, remind yourself of the training benefits that more than balance the scales:

- Employee buy-in: Effective training shows users how a new platform simplifies and streamlines their work, engendering feelings of comfort and engagement together with high levels of software adoption.
- Productivity: Learning to navigate unfamiliar screens and processes enables employees to use new technology without getting stuck. Absent frustration and confusion to slow them down, users can make rapid gains in efficiency and confidence.
- Trust and teamwork: Employees feel supported by the instruction they receive. Resistance declines and is replaced by proficiency and assurance. The capabilities of the entire user base expand and confidence multiplies, driving momentum toward realizing the organization's goals.
- Proven performance benefits: A recent IDC study documents the strong correlation between hours of software instruction and performance benefits. With sufficient end-user training, organizations realized an average of seven to 13 times improvement in key performance measures. The enterprises showing the highest gains had delivered 32 hours of blended training to each end-user. ("Blended" is a combination of learning modalities, covered in more detail below.)



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# Essential Steps to Effective Training

Get employees on board with the program – In a nutshell, end-users have to be primed for a system changeover and you must communicate the reason for the upheaval: namely, superior business outcomes. When employees grasp the importance of the new software, the value it will bring, and the part they will play in its success, they will be much less likely to resist the change. This groundwork needs to be followed up with a program of thorough training and support. Otherwise, employees are unlikely to adopt the platform, excel with it, and be productive and happy in their work.

## START WITH NEEDS ANALYSIS

Before you can put together an effective training syllabus, you have to identify the skills each employee group already has, and those they must acquire: different user categories have widely divergent needs.

Casual and infrequent users present the lightest instructional load, as they don't often interact with the software and generally utilize a limited feature set. Next come employees who regularly use the platform but stay close to basic built-in functionality. On the other end of the spectrum are sophisticated 'power users' who access advanced features to perform complex tasks and processes.

Evaluate the roles, responsibilities, and existing competencies of each target group and design

their curricula accordingly. Plan for sustainable and consistent training that provides long-term support and knowledge transfer.

## OFFER BLENDED LEARNING

Recent research sheds new light on learning dynamics and has led to innovative modalities that move beyond conventional formal classroom training. Given the variety of learning styles, schedules, time zones, and geographies encountered in large enterprises, standard live instructor-led classes are not always practical or cost-effective. When employees are spread out over diverse regions, self-paced e-learning modules work very well, especially when accessible on demand regardless of time or location. Rapid authoring tools allow you to create simulation-based online courses that are learner-centric and impactful.

Ideally, you should provide your people with a blend of learning options that includes on-site training, live virtual courses, and self-paced recorded tutorials geared to their skill levels and application needs. You should also weave scenario-based "how to" guides and step-by-step demonstrations into courses and conversational audio. Internal surveys have shown these to be especially effective for end-users. We recommend you combine informal and social learning with traditional course offerings and deliver customized micro-learning and process guidance where it's needed most: right inside applications.

Blended learning best practices typically encompass:

- **Formal training:** Pre-recorded courseware hosted on a learning management system (LMS) and live instructor-led training, either in a physical classroom or delivered virtually and accessible on demand
- **Informal training:** Online e-books and reference material, video tutorials, and user-to-user Q&A, guidance, and collaboration via the enterprise's internal social network
- **On-the-job performance support:** This is a relatively recent innovation developed in response to research showing the effectiveness of learning on the job: real-time micro-training modules embedded at key points within applications. Need-specific and highly targeted, this type of material is generally custom-developed using a content authoring system. The payoff is well worth the effort, in terms of rapid and effective user acquisition of essential skills
- **Supervisor: employee coaching.** The employee-supervisor relationship is an important avenue for managing technology change in the context of reinforcing engagement. Studies show that employees respond positively to their manager's voiced enthusiasm for innovation and change. Managers should utilize regular one-on-one check-ins to air employee concerns and needs, hear about their training experiences, recognize achievement, and provide assistance

when needed. Thanks to their special connection with direct reports, supervisors are well positioned to discern and soften resistance, appreciate and support progress, and sustain motivation and engagement throughout software deployment

### **GIVE TRAINING THE PROPER PRIORITY**

When the word goes out to reduce budgets, end-user enablement is often the first item to be trimmed: a prime example of penny-wise, pound-foolish decision making. Training is a relatively inexpensive incremental expense compared to the company's overall investment of time, money, and resources in new systems. Think of user enablement as an insurance policy against software failure and employee disengagement.

Develop and protect your training budget early in the software implementation cycle. Make sure you have the timing right as well: if you're rolling out a simple system update, short refresher courses can be staggered over a couple of weeks. But when replacing an accounts receivable system, for example, many employees will need training and guidance over a period of months before achieving fluency with the new platform. Be sure to continue end-user support after initial ramp-up. Bear in mind that not everyone will have the same ongoing needs and that some employees will require longer-term assistance than others.

### **TRAIN ACCORDING TO ROLE**

Employees from diverse departments – for example, finance, HR, procurement, marketing, and sales – typically utilize different components and functionality within the larger platform. You can orient your training programs accordingly and provide instruction only on what's relevant. In this way, you won't expend time and resources educating employees on modules that aren't pertinent to their jobs and which they're not expected to use.

### **BEGIN WELL BEFORE GO-LIVE**

With major implementations, experts recommend beginning preparations for end-user training 15 months in advance of your system start date. The first task is educating the managers and team leaders in charge of various business processes who can then mentor their respective end-users. We recommend you hold off on formal instruction for the latter groups until fairly close to go-live: if training is delivered too far in advance, it likely won't be retained. "We want to train them right before they switch to the new solution. If we train them two months in advance, they won't remember it at all" recommends a senior manager of PMO and enablement at a food and beverage manufacturer.

### **INCLUDE HANDS-ON TRAINING**

Faulty use habits are easy to acquire but hard to unlearn. They can have serious downstream consequences and take a long time to ferret out and rectify. This is why effective training programs include a safe, 'risk-free' version of the software – separate from your actual production instance – where users can experiment with features and work through processes in a simulated real-world environment. This enables them to catch and self-correct bad practices before they can become ingrained.

### **SOLICIT EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK**

Try to encourage end-users to submit comments and constructive criticism about the training they receive and their experience with the new system. Were the courses and materials helpful, timely, and engaging? Do they feel competent and comfortable with the technology? Do they have suggestions on improving the training or the usability of the system itself? Such honest and authentic dialogue is highly valuable for fine-tuning enablement programs, makes employees feel included, and diminishes resistance to change.

"We want to **train them right** before they switch to the new solution. If we train them two months in advance, they won't remember it at all."

Senior manager, PMO

# Effective Training is Where Happy Endings Begin

All in all, bear in mind that success with enterprise software depends on people. With the right training, enablement, and support, user disengagement, stress, and frustration can be replaced with productive and satisfying experiences that drive higher software adoption, greater employee engagement, and superior business results.



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